



United States Attorney's Office
District of Columbia

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PRESS RELEASE

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Former American University employee pleads guilty to taking nearly \$400,000 in Law Review funds

WASHINGTON - A 49-year-old former employee of the American University, Martine Tavakoli, has pled guilty to a charge of interstate transportation of stolen property, for stealing nearly \$400,000 worth of checks made out to the American University Law Review and various other AU law journals, over a six-year period from 2003 to 2009, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. announced today.

Tavakoli, of McLean, Virginia, entered her guilty plea today before U.S. District Senior Judge Paul L. Friedman. When Tavakoli is sentenced on September 22, 2010, she faces a maximum of up to 10 years of imprisonment under the statute and a likely sentencing range of 18 to 24 months in prison under the sentencing guidelines. As part of her plea agreement, Tavakoli agreed to make full restitution in the amount of \$399,529.57.

According to the government's evidence, Tavakoli began work at American University in 1981, as Administrative Assistant for the Law Review. In 1998, she was promoted to Coordinator, Law Journals. Her job included receiving checks mailed to American University's law school (known as the Washington College of Law) made out to the American University Law Review (AULR) and various other AU law journals, depositing those checks in a bank account, and disbursing funds to pay expenses of the various law journals.

In September 1998, Tavakoli went to a branch of SunTrust Bank in McLean, Virginia, and opened a new bank account in the joint name "AULR c/o Martine Tavakoli," using the American University taxpayer identification number and her own home address. She opened this account, and throughout the ensuing years made use of it, without the knowledge of American University.

Beginning at least in or about January 2003, and continuing until in or about June 2009, Tavakoli would from time to time transport, from her AU office in the District of Columbia, to the SunTrust branch in McLean, Virginia, checks made payable to the AULR or one of the other journals, and would deposit those checks in the secret bank account. Tavakoli used the funds in

the secret account to pay her rent, credit card bills, and other personal expenses, on a steady, ongoing basis. During that period of time, she deposited a total of \$399,529.57 into the account.

In September 2009, when confronted by American University personnel, Tavakoli admitted she had opened the account, deposited law journal checks into the account, and paid personal living expenses out of the account.

In announcing today's guilty plea, U.S. Attorney Machen praised the work of American University Director of Public Safety Michael McNair. He also acknowledged the efforts of Legal Assistant Jamasee Lucas and SEEP Student Sierra Tate, as well as Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Friedman, who is handling this prosecution.

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